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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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PART IVSOVIET POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE DEATH OF STALINReactions to Stalin's death

The news of STALIN's death in March 1953 was received by the majority of the Soviet troops with genuine sadness; tears appeared in the eyes of, at any rate, many of the official speakers at Party meetings. At the same time there was a feeling of vague relief and a hope that some of the autocratic aspects of STALIN's regime would be softened. No drastic changes were expected, or even desired. In view of the widespread fear of war, thought by some to be a real danger created partly by the leader's provocative, arrogant attitude in international affairs -- it was particularly hoped that the new regime would be more conciliatory towards the West.

Reactions to new leaders

2. There was much speculation as to who would succeed STALIN as head of the government. Many people had expected it to be MOLOTOV, as he was a well-known and rare survivor of the Bolshevik Old Guard. Nevertheless, the appointment of MALENKOV came as no great surprise, as he was widely believed to have been a close confidant of STALIN. The names of the other members, including BERIA, of the new government were in general not unpopular as they were mainly those of men who had for a long time held responsible ministerial posts.
3. The new emphasis on the supply of consumer goods, associated chiefly with MALENKOV, was popular, especially as it was in the early stages of the new regime borne out by an increase of such things in the shops.
4. Great Russians (& Ukrainians) were on the whole pleased that a Georgian had been replaced by a Russian. Those who fell into this category had an additional pleasure when a second Georgian (BERIA) was also replaced by a Russian. Many Russians believed that STALIN and BERIA had tended to favour the Caucasian Republics in respect of living conditions at the expense of other parts of the U.S.S.R. Those Black Marketeers who were not Jews were usually Caucasians, and it was hoped that the new regime would adopt sterner measures against them than STALIN had apparently done.
5. The announcement of income tax reliefs and the reduction in compulsory deliveries of products to the State for Kolkhoz workers was also enthusiastically received. These measures were unlike the increase of consumer goods -- not associated with MALENKOV personally.

Disillusionment with new regime

6. As time went on the initial feeling of optimism regarding the new Government began to wane, when it was realised that material conditions were reverting to those existing before STALIN's death, if not deteriorating still further. an example 25X1
SARATOV in the late spring of 1953 a distinct improvement 25X1
in the supply of foodstuffs in the shops. A year later in the same city such 25X1
things as sausages, sugar and butter were well-nigh unobtainable. The mood of the 25X1
local civilian population was one of disillusionment. The deterioration was not
attributed to MALENKOV or any other leading figure, but rather to general
inefficiency and red tape now that the strong hand of the wise teacher STALIN had
been removed. The dismissal of MALENKOV early in 1955 occasioned great surprise 25X1
If he were to be completely
liquidated like BERIA, and if any further similar high-level changes should now 25X1
take place, the latent disappointment felt by a large section
of the Soviet people would quickly be transformed into loss of confidence in the
Government generally. Already some people were beginning jokingly to compare the

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state of affairs in the U.S.S.R. with that of FRANCE with its frequent changes of government.

Increasing influence of the Army

7. Since the latest reshuffles and the coming into prominence of military men in the Government a feeling has arisen in the Army that the Army's prestige has been given a considerable boost. This should not be taken to mean, however, that the Army will necessarily have any more say in decisions taken by the Central Committee. Relations between Army and Party at top levels are believed to be good. No major changes of general policy are likely to result. It is believed, however, that as far as the Army itself is concerned conditions of service may improve. After STALIN's death there was a fear that certain pay privileges - such as "rank pay" - might be withdrawn by the new civilian leaders who wished to economise. Now that military men have received high posts, this is unlikely.

(Note: It seems that STALIN was regarded in the Army as an advocate of good conditions for officers, partly by which he managed to retain their support).

8.

[redacted] brief comments on the new Army leaders :

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BULGANIN - little known in Army circles, especially during the Second World War when he might have been expected to come into the limelight. [redacted] he had been a permanent adviser on military affairs to the Government during the war, and [redacted] well-versed in them now. His sudden promotion to the rank of Marshal has occasioned some surprise.

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ZHUKOV - Has always been and still is extremely popular with the Army and with the civilian population. Admired by officers as a strong personality who quickly brought order to Eastern Germany after the Soviets had occupied it. Well-known as a most able and experienced "military" Marshal as opposed to a "fake" Marshal, such as BULGANIN.

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